



Forest
Service

Washington
Office

1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

File Code: 2620/2200

Date: August 19, 2011

Route To:

Subject: Bighorn Sheep Analysis for NEPA Documents

To: Regional Foresters R-1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6

The relationship between bighorn sheep population viability and domestic sheep grazing on National Forest System lands continues to be an important wildlife and range management issue facing the Forest Service on western rangelands. Where management objectives include maintenance or enhancement of bighorn sheep populations, the potential for disease transmission from domestic sheep/goats to bighorn sheep must be addressed. To meet these objectives, forests must conduct a bighorn sheep risk assessment using the enclosed viability analysis outline.

When making decisions requiring National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis, the level of analysis should be commensurate with the complexity of the proposed action. For example, due to the complexity of the situation on the Payette National Forest, a comprehensive and quantitative model-based risk assessment was completed. Results of that risk assessment contributed to the rationale for the forest supervisor's decision that a progressive reduction of suitable domestic sheep grazing was needed to support viable populations of bighorn sheep in the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area and the Salmon River Mountains. Forests that have necessary data, issue complexity, and the ability to conduct a quantitative bighorn sheep viability analysis may do so. However, a qualitative approach to NEPA analysis for bighorn sheep viability is sufficient as long as clear and reasonable rationale for the decision is displayed.

Our viability analyses should be based upon current scientific information. In addition, we should coordinate with States taking into consideration state wildlife plans. Where viability assessments indicate a high likelihood of disease transmission and a resulting risk to bighorn sheep population viability across the forest, the goal of spatial and/or temporal separation between domestic sheep/goats and bighorn sheep is the most prudent action we can use to manage risk of disease transmission.

If you have questions, please contact Anne Zimmermann, Director, WFWARP at (202) 205-1167 or Ralph Giffen, Acting Director, Rangeland Management at (202) 205-1455.

/s/ James M. Pena (for)
JOEL D. HOLTROP
Deputy Chief, National Forest System

Enclosure (below)



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Four Step Outline for Conducting Bighorn Sheep Viability Analysis (At Forest Planning Level)

The following 4-step outline for conducting an analysis for bighorn sheep viability will be used to assist in standardizing qualitative risk assessment across the western states. Recent efforts by Region 2 and Region 4 to develop an interim qualitative risk assessment have been considered.

1. Gather applicable data and information from appropriate sources.*
 - In all NEPA analysis regarding bighorn sheep viability, coordinate with state fish and game agencies and consider state wildlife management plans for bighorn sheep.
 - ✓ Identify seasonal bighorn sheep occupied habitats (to infer bighorn sheep core herd home range areas).
 - ✓ Consider objectives for critical/core and non-critical/core herds.
2. Assess spatial and temporal overlap of bighorn sheep core herd home ranges with domestic sheep allotments, use areas, and driveways using, but not limited to:
 - Maps showing suitable (occupied and unoccupied) bighorn sheep habitat (including suitable source bighorn sheep summer habitat).*
 - Maps showing habitat connectivity between bighorn sheep core herd home ranges and domestic sheep allotments, use areas, and driveways (if information is available).*
 - Distances between bighorn sheep core herd home ranges and domestic sheep allotments, use areas, driveways (if information is available).
 - The proportion of rams/ewes within the bighorn sheep population that foray outside of the core herd home range and the distances they foray.
3. Assess likelihood of contact (low, moderate, high) based on spatial and temporal overlap between allotments and bighorn sheep herds.
4. Identify management practices with the goal of separation between domestic and bighorn sheep where necessary to provide for Forest-wide bighorn sheep viability.

*Step #1 and bighorn sheep habitat mapping efforts under Step #2 are in-progress or have been completed in many states by Forest Service and state wildlife biologist. Contact your regional wildlife program leader to determine what maps are currently available from the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) Bighorn Sheep Working Group.



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Subject: Bighorn Sheep Analysis for NEPA Documents

To: Regional Forester, R-1, Regional Forester, R-2, Regional Forester, R-3, Regional Forester, R-4, Regional Forester, R-5, Regional Forester, R-6

The relationship between bighorn sheep population viability and domestic sheep and goat grazing on National Forest System (NFS) lands continues to be an important management issue facing the Forest Service on western rangelands. On August 19, 2011, Deputy Chief for National Forest Systems, Joel Holtrop, issued a letter (attached) identifying the four-step outline for conducting a qualitative Bighorn Sheep Viability Analysis at the Forest Plan level. Implementation of the August 2011 letter and four-step outline is crucial to the Agency's continued efforts to minimize the potential for disease transmission through interactions between bighorn sheep and domestic sheep.

Recently, the first two steps of the outline were completed with the generation of maps and associated shapefiles that show occupied bighorn sheep habitat and domestic sheep grazing allotments. These maps also identify areas of potential overlap of bighorn and domestic sheep ranges and where disease transmission might be a concern. The maps are filed at (T:\FS\NFS\R02\Program\2600WildlifeMgmt\GIS\Final_BHSMs-Data_BLM_FS_Feb2012), and can also be located on the Forest Service Web site at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/biology/wildlife/curl.html>.

These maps represent a joint effort between the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Wild Sheep Working Group (WAFWA WSWG). NFS data, including active and vacant sheep and goat allotments, and vacant cattle allotments, were derived from the INFRA database using tabular data from November 2011 and spatial data from 2008. The intention is to update NFS layers annually in the late spring or early summer. It is imperative that units maintain current, accurate INFRA records. The occupied bighorn sheep layers were supplied by individual States as part of the WAFWA WSWG. The States will also keep their data updated as new information becomes available. Work on the remaining components/tools in the 4-step outline continues. Forests should use the State-based maps and the additional new tools to address the potential for contact and the risk of disease transmission between domestic sheep/goats and wild sheep. Field units should continue to work with State wildlife organizations, local stakeholders, and the livestock industry in striving for solutions.

LESLIE A. C. WELDON
Deputy Chief, National Forest System

Enclosure





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Washington
Office

1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

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Date: July 31, 2014

Subject: Bighorn Sheep Analysis for NEPA Documents

To: Regional Foresters, R-1, R-2, R-3, R-4, R-5, and R-6

The relationship between bighorn sheep population viability and domestic sheep and goat grazing on National Forest System (NFS) lands continues to be an important management issue. On August 19, 2011, Deputy Chief for National Forest System, Joel Holtrop, issued a letter (enclosed) identifying a four-step outline for conducting a qualitative bighorn sheep analysis at the Forest Plan level. Subsequently, on June 11, 2012, Deputy Chief for National Forest System, Leslie Weldon, issued a letter (enclosed) releasing maps that fulfill the first two steps of the four-step process. Implementation of the August 2011 letter and the four-step process remains a vital component of the Agency's continued efforts to maintain viable populations of bighorn sheep while balancing multiple-use demands.

There is a need to clarify the importance of balancing multiple-use demands with the management practices to support viable populations of bighorn sheep and a healthy domestic sheep industry. Best management practices to maintain separation need to be applied to the extent they are effective in supporting both uses. When a line officer determines that the potential risk for contact, as identified through the four-step process, is at an unacceptable level, those officers need to identify and analyze potential replacement allotments when developing management alternatives. The analysis for alternatives for replacement allotments should be part of a single decision-making process as part of ongoing collaborative efforts to identify and develop site-specific solutions.

Working with Federal partners, such as the Agricultural Research Service and Bureau of Land Management, State wildlife organizations, local stakeholders, and the livestock industry remains a crucial aspect of the Agency's continued efforts in striving for balanced solutions. If you have questions, please contact Rob Harper, Director, Watershed, Fish, Wildlife, Air, and Rare Plants at (202) 205-1671.

/s/ Gregory Smith (for)
LESLIE A. C. WELDON
Deputy Chief, National Forest System

Enclosures

